

Life in the Stage Coach Days
at
Historic Sherrill's Inn

Paintings by
Elizabeth Cramer McClure

on the walls of a room
in the original inn
restored as a home by
Mr. and Mrs. James G. K. McClure
Fairview, North Carolina
near Hickory Nut Gap
and reproduced as a color section
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by
Ora Blackmun



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This is the view of Sherrill's Inn seen by travelers approaching it from Asheville. At the foot of the long hill the coachman blows his horn to indicate the number of guests so that the Sherrill family might prepare accordingly. Two elegant city guests attempt to kill a rattlesnake while their mountain guide stands ready with a stick in case the gun misses fire. The native wild flowers in the foreground appear in several of the panels.



Small bands of Cherokees sometimes hunted in the Fairview Valley, once a part of their far-flung domain. For protection, white settlers entering the region before 1800 built a small blockhouse, complete with gun ports. This log building still stands beside the Sherrill Inn.



The coach is stuck fast. The feeble attempts made by two young dandies to loosen the wheel are rendered futile by the determination to keep their white breeches unspotted. An elderly gentleman stands aloof to read his paper. A lady and her little girl stroll among the wild flowers. The coachman and his wife on the box await the outcome. This scene must often have been repeated in this red mud country.



Farmers drove their livestock many miles to eastern markets. The passing droves of hogs were offered a choice of chestnuts or acorns at Sherrill's Inn. Applejack was standard for the men. Farmers bringing produce from Polk County to Asheville camped with their covered wagons along the highway just below the Inn.



These people with their scant belongings are moving to some hillside farm. The hardships of life in the mountains are reflected in the strong but pinched face of the mother and in the indomitable spirit of the grandparents trudging by the side of the wagon. The husband looks toward the future with the hope of a better life for his children.



At the arrival of the stagecoach, Mrs. Sherrill descends the steps to greet the travelers. Her husband, Bedford, offers the guests a tray of applejack. A young man at the Inn ignores the coach and its passengers as he introduces a friend to the belle of the hostelry, who is standing near the bee skeps. A neighbor youngster is momentarily absorbed in chasing a chicken. A recent wall crack shows in this picture.



In the stone-paved courtyard back of the Inn a coach could be kept over night. In this yard, too, was the spring house and nearby stood the old fort. In the Inn cooking was done for the guests and the family over an open fire. It was said that at times the ghost of a young lady with long curls and a “sweep-tail” skirt could be seen melting into the fireplace chimney. Her face was always averted.



A detachment of soldiers from Stoneman's forces, coming through Hickory Nut Gap, stopped at the Inn. Sherrill descendants tell of the captain riding his horse onto the porch, demanding a night's lodging. The family had hidden the supply of hams behind the wall boards of the original log room at the end of the house. They had covered the signs of recent carpentry by hanging Mrs. Sherrill's hoop skirts on the wall.